



## HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

### Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Scott Perry (R-PA) Oversight and Management Efficiency Subcommittee

*Opioids in the Homeland: DHS Coordination with State and Local Partners to Fight the Epidemic*

June 19, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

Our nation is in the midst of a deadly epidemic. Since 1999, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that overdose deaths in the U.S. from opioid substances, like prescription painkillers, heroin, and fentanyl have more than quadrupled. In 2016 alone, 67% of all drug-related overdose deaths nationwide involved prescription and illicit opioids, totaling an estimated 42,000 deaths. This is a crisis that has affected the entire American homeland. No state or community has been spared from devastating impacts of opioid abuse.

In my home state of Pennsylvania, where today we meet in the historic State Capitol Building, the epidemic has hit especially hard. In 2016, over 4,600 Pennsylvanians lost their lives due to drug overdoses. Moreover, in that same year, Pennsylvania had the fourth highest rate of deaths due to opioid-related drug overdoses out of all 50 states, tallying 37.9 deaths for every 100,000 people. While I am usually proud to tout statistics about how Pennsylvania is leading the nation, this is one instance I wish I could say Pennsylvania is not at the forefront.

Despite this disheartening reality, I am proud of my state for taking a strong and unified stance in its response to the opioid crisis. Since January, Pennsylvania has been operating under a statewide disaster declaration in response to the epidemic. The disaster declaration has allowed the Commonwealth to mobilize state resources, improve coordination between state agencies with the establishment of the Opioid Command Center, and increase access to treatment for those most in need. As a result of this unified effort, 3,660 calls have been made to the Drug and Alcohol Program hotline, and 29,208 doses of naloxone have been distributed across the state resulting in 1,436 overdose reversals. Additionally, Pennsylvania's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program is accredited with helping to reduce the number of opioids prescribed. From 2016 to 2017, the number of opioids prescribed in Pennsylvania decreased by 14%, which is the second highest reduction rate across the country. Pennsylvania can certainly be proud of this statistic.

In addition to state and local efforts, the federal government also plays a major role in fighting the opioid crisis. For example, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) coordinates with local law enforcement on investigations regarding narcotics smuggling and helps provide training to state and local officials. DHS's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) works to interdict the flow of opioids from places like China and Mexico at ports of entry and international mail facilities. In addition, CBP officers provide

support to the Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center, one of Pennsylvania's three information sharing fusions centers, which I had an opportunity to visit earlier today.

The opioid epidemic poses a unique challenge for federal, state, and local officials. Opioids are often more readily available than other types of drugs, with the CDC estimating that in 2016, 40% of opioid-related overdose deaths involved prescriptions that could be obtained from a physician. Additionally, e-commerce in the modern world and the high value of small doses of synthetic opioids like fentanyl have allowed transnational criminal organizations and drug dealers to distribute opioids in nontraditional ways by exploiting the internet and postal service and cutting out the middlemen normally targeted by law enforcement during drug investigations.

These challenges underscore the importance of understanding and reinforcing the relationship between federal entities and state and local officials in order to create a force multiplier to tackle this devastating and deadly epidemic. This is a complex crisis that calls for a multifaceted response from public officials at all levels.

Last week, my colleagues in the United States House of Representatives and I passed a multitude of bills aimed at fighting the opioid epidemic that is crippling our communities. For example, one bill requires the United States Postal Service (USPS) to transmit advance electronic data to CBP on certain international packages in order to enhance the targeting of suspicious packages. Numerous other bills also offered solutions to this crisis by addressing treatment, recovery, and prevention efforts.

I want to thank our panel for appearing before the Subcommittee this morning on this very important issue. I look forward to learning more about the Department of Homeland Security's coordination with State and local officials in the Commonwealth in order to combat the opioid epidemic and protect the homeland.

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